

Police Head in New Orleans Crisis

Clarence Benedict Giarrusso

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Thirty hours without sleep, his face deeply lined, Police Superintendent Clarence B. Giarrusso slumped on a couch in Downtown Howard Johnson's Motor Lodge and tried to answer the questions peppering him.

Was it a national conspiracy? Had his men acted properly? And, above all, where was the second sniper?

For a day and a half this city, fascinated and horrified had watched, glued to television sets, as thousands of rounds of gunfire echoed only a few blocks from City Hall. Atop the motel one or more snipers, secure in concrete bunkers formed by stair shafts, held off hundreds of law-enforcement officers until one sniper was slain from a helicopter.

For Clarence Benedict Giarrusso, it was the worst crisis in a two-year leadership of a police force that has seen numerous crises.

Uncertain Answers

His answers in the heat of the latest crisis early this morning were uncertain but measured. Later today, after some sleep, the answers were no more certain.

"I'm undecided," he said on the question of the existence of the second sniper. "Right now we have evidence on both sides."

And, although politicians here are decrying an alleged nationwide conspiracy to slay policemen, the superintendent shied away from such assertions, noting only that "there are fuzzy groups, but in our free and open society we permit them to exist."

A cop's cop, Superintendent Giarrusso joined the department on July 5, 1949, after serving as a sergeant in the Marine Corps. His brother was a policeman, one of his daughters is married to a policeman and his nephew is a policeman.

Twenty-one years after he joined the department, he succeeded his brother, Joseph I. Giarrusso, as superintendent.

I went through. I kept putting his jacket aside."

In between, Mr. Giarrusso rose through the motorcycle division to the narcotics bureau in 1954, where he became a sergeant, then a lieutenant, finally a captain



Associated Press

His personnel folder "kept sticking out."

in command of the narcotics squad in 1968.

Meanwhile, he was studying at night to win three degrees: a law degree from Loyola University and degrees in criminology and public business administration from Tulane.

Mr. Giarrusso, a stocky man of medium height, devotes almost all of his time to his police work and family, and has no hobbies, although he sometimes goes salt-water fishing for redfish.

He was born in New Orleans on March 28, 1921. He and his wife, the former Catherine Viviano, have two daughters, Lea, 21 years old, and Cathy, 20, and a son, Clarence Jr., 6, who was described by a friend as "the light of his father's life."

"Since he took over, the department has been beset by one crisis after another," said Policewoman Carol A. Gomon, the department's public-information director. "His philosophy is to move slowly, accurately and completely. He avoids rumor and sensationalism."

The first crisis came shortly after he took over the department. A group of Black Panthers barricaded themselves in a building near the all-black Desire public-housing project, and a gun battle ensued.

Superintendent Giarrusso's supporters note that he sent his men around the neighborhood first, knocking on doors and warning people to leave the area. But he also received strong criticism from blacks for his conduct of the raid.

A second incident involved the eviction of some Panthers who had barricaded themselves in the basement of one of the buildings in the project.

Mr. Giarrusso, dispatched a force of armed men but then removed them when a lawyer for the Panthers said an injunction was being sought. The superintendent explained to the angry and frustrated policemen that he was seeking "to avoid a bloodbath" and to allow the Panthers legal recourse.

The Panthers were later seized by the police.

Superintendent Giarrusso's term has been marked both by criticism and praise, often from the same groups of people at different times.